

Bamidbar

“Do this with them, that they may live and not die when they approach the most sacred objects: let Aharon and his sons go in and assign each of them to his duties and to his portorage. But let not [the Kohathites] go inside and witness the dismantling of the sanctuary, lest they die.” (Numbers 4:19-20)

In the above verse, Hashem instructs Moshe to caution his brother Aharon: when engaged in their sacred service in the Temple, he and his sons must be extremely careful to follow the correct order of things. If they fail to do this, death could be the result.

The Chasam Sofer explains this passage homiletically. The Sages tell us: “What should someone do that he might live? He should ‘kill’ himself. And what should he do if he wishes to die? He should give himself life. The Chasam Sofer interprets this passage: In this world, we must ‘kill’ ourselves--deny our desires and avoid senseless pleasure-seeking--in order to ‘live’ in the next world. A surefire way to ‘die’ in the next world, however, is to devote ourselves to the improvement of our lives in this world, a lifestyle of hedonism.

The Chasam Sofer explains that with this in mind, there is a risk that one may take it too far. Perhaps he will become so dismissive of the value of life in this world that he will come to neglect his health and bodily needs entirely. This is not the correct approach. It is only possible to perform mitzvos and serve Hashem by being alive and of sound body and mind. As the pasuk says: we must “live and not die” when we approach our “sacred” duty here in this world, for we must take care not to “witness the dismantling of the sanctuary,” our bodies, which are a holy Temple.

"He who has health, has hope; and he who has hope, has everything."

Thomas Carlyle

Shabbat Shalom

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